

How Did We Get Here?

Professor Holly Ahern, of State University of New York Adirondack, has extensive teaching and research experience in bacteriology and molecular biology. She's the author of nationally published textbooks on microbiology, cell biology, and molecular biology. She's also an expert on the scientific literature pertaining to Lyme disease and other tick-borne infections.

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Professor Ahern came to her Lyme expertise the hard way, as the mother of a daughter with Lyme disease. Her professional knowledge was put to the practical test of having to navigate the complex care of a Lyme patient. She understands the science and has complete empathy for the suffering that tick-borne diseases inflict on patients and families.

In 2017, she gave an illuminating presentation at the Focus on Lyme Scientific Conference in Scottsdale, Arizona. Addressing the historical events that have contributed to the Lyme disease epidemic in the U.S., she reminds the audience of something they know too well—"We are not in a good place when it comes to Lyme disease." Then, she answers the question: how did we get here?

Ahern clearly lays out the "alternative conclusions" that over past decades have perpetuated the idea that Lyme disease is "hard to catch and easy treat." That misconception continues to be encouraged by the CDC and IDSA today.

She points out that, in fact:

1. Lyme is easy to catch: “Lyme disease is the second most common infectious disease in the United States.”
2. Testing for Lyme is highly inaccurate: “The recommended serological assays for Lyme disease are falsely negative more than half the time.”
3. Lyme infection can be chronic: “There are hundreds of peer-reviewed studies that show the relationship between bacterial infection and chronic disease, not just Lyme disease.”
4. Antibiotics do treat infection: “Of the clinical trials done to date, not one of them provides conclusive scientific evidence to prove antibiotics show no benefit to patients with chronic symptoms.”

Ahern reviews the epidemiology used in the discovery of Lyme disease and the science from the original studies of 40 years ago, demonstrating the following facts:

1. Only 25% of patients with Lyme will develop a bull’s-eye rash.
2. Only 50% of patients with Lyme will develop the antibodies needed for a positive test.
3. Only 50% of patients with Lyme will test positive using the CDC “gold standard” two-tier test.
4. Only 50% of patients treated with two weeks of antibiotics will get better.

Ahern uses humor and wit to describe the current scientific data, which refutes the notion that patients with persistent symptoms from Lyme disease are not helped with longer-term antibiotics.

If you want to know exactly how we got to where we are today with the Lyme epidemic, watch this presentation.



Editor's note: Any medical information included is based on a personal experience. For questions or concerns regarding health, please consult a doctor or medical professional.

